

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

58th year

36 Pages

Hollywood

Monday, July 11, 1988

Vol. CCCIII, No. 10

75 Cents

'Expose' kicks off Saban syndie slate

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Underscoring an ambitious production slate and acquisitions geared for its new international division, Saban Prods. has signed award-winning investigative journalist Jack Anderson to host four syndicated, two-hour, live-event specials — the first presenting new evidence linking organized crime to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

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Kennedy.

According to president Haim Saban and executive vp Robert Unkel, kicking off the "American Expose" Anderson series will be an in-depth analysis of JFK's demise, which Saban stated is "from the point of view involving one of the very highest members of the mob."

Unkel added, "It's quite obvious that Oswald wasn't acting alone. Who was behind Oswald? Were there co-conspirators, also armed, who also fired the trigger? Yes, there were. The show will answer the questions of who carried it out, (and) why and how the assassination was conducted."

He further revealed that the unidentified organized-crime figure first contacted Anderson five years ago to confess involvement in JFK's death, in which accused Kennedy assassin Lee Harvey Oswald was purportedly used as the front for the carefully orchestrated plan.

The special will most likely originate from Washington, D.C., and will air in late October or early November, with a repeat to follow later that week. November 22, 1988, marks the 25th anniversary of JFK's death.

Saban's new international division is handling foreign sales of all "American Expose" programs. "We have a tremendous level of interest for the Kennedy special from virtually every market throughout the world," stated Saban. "The Kennedy myth is not just an American myth."

Producing "American Expose" are

Malcolm Barbour and John Langley, whose credits include Geraldo Rivera's string of successful syndicated live-event specials.

According to Unkel, a new consortium, comprised of MCA (WWOR), United/Chris-Craft Gaylord (and possibly, Group W) stations, has already signed up for the series to kick off their joint venture — representing up to 35% of the country and eight of the top 10 markets — with an ultimate clearance of "most of the country within the month," according to Unkel.

In Los Angeles, the Anderson specials will air on independent station KCOP.

The executive vp noted the programs will be offered on a barter split of 12 minutes for local stations and 12 minutes held for national advertising spots. The JFK entry, along with the three to follow, will all be distributed by Orbis Communications.

The second live-event special from Anderson will most likely be "Terrorism U.S.A.," revealing a "chain of revelations of various plans by terrorist groups within and outside of the U.S.," stated Saban. "Terrorism" is set to air in the first quarter of 1989.

Both programs will be offered to stations beginning this week, according to the Saban executives. Saban stated the two initial programs are budgeted in the \$3 million range.

Underscoring Saban's pledge that the company has "\$10 million earmarked for acquisitions in the international marketplace," Unkel and Saban confirmed that the company is actively entering into co-production and distribution deals for miniseries and telefilms

specifically having international, and not solely domestic, appeal.

Saban also has entered into a production-distribution agreement with Japan's Fuji-8 network for 26 half-hours of the animated series "Noozles," which Saban said has been sold to Nickelodeon.

Saban said also that the company has contracted for 39 half-hours from Toei Co. for a live-action series already sold to France's TF-1. Another development has Saban in a co-production deal "now in active negotiations" with Antenne-2 in France for a new animated series.

The company is also buying a Japanese program called "Mega Man," with Saban planning to use the special effects from the original footage intercut with new American material (and U.S. actors) to result in what Saban called "Robocop Meets Batman." The series will have its premiere at next year's NATPE program conference.

Yet another project on the Saban slate — given a firm go, according to the company's president — has Saban contracting with Nippon Animation of Japan to produce 26 half-hours based on Grimm's Fairy Tales.

Saban International is also handling foreign sales of DIC Enterprises' "C.O.P.S." (65 half-hours) and "The New Archies," (13 half-hours) which according to the president, "sold out completely within six months."

Haim Saban added that the company is now developing a "primetime network vehicle" in the genre of Fox's "America's Most Wanted" and NBC's "Unsolved Mysteries," with the Saban project having direct audience interaction.